

* Call to Celebration: From: Micah 6:6-8 and Mark 12:28-34

Leader: With what shall we come before the LORD, and worship God on high?

PEOPLE: HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE!
WE COME TO LOVE THE LORD WITH ALL OUR HEART AND SOUL!

Leader: Shall we come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

PEOPLE: NO! WE COME TO LOVE THE LORD WITH ALL OUR MIND AND
STRENGTH!

Leader: Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers
of oil?

PEOPLE: NO! WE COME TO WORSHIP GOD BY LOVING ALL OTHER
PEOPLE EVERYWHERE AS MUCH AS WE LOVE OURSELVES!

Leader: Shall we give our first-born for our transgression, the fruit of our body for the
sin of our soul?

PEOPLE: NO! NO! TEN THOUSAND TIMES NO!
GOD HAS SHOWED US WHAT IS GOOD;
AND WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF US
BUT TO DO JUSTICE, AND TO DO LOVING KINDNESS,
AND TO WALK HUMBL Y WITH OUR GOD!

Sermon: January 2, 2011

OUR CALL TO SERVE

Today, we celebrate Epiphany, the day the Wisemen came to see Jesus in the manger. But epiphany also means “to have an insight”, To have an “Ah Hah! Experience.

The hymn we just sang has these words in it: “Spirit of the Living God, Fall Afresh on me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me. Mold me. Fill me. Use me. Spirit of the Living God fall afresh on me.” This hymn is about having an “Ah Hah!” experience every day. Every time we Breathe, think of it as inhaling the Breath of God that gives us life. That can make every day the first day of your life.

In Genesis chapter 2, verse 7 it says: “Then the LORD GOD formed human beings out of dust from the ground, and Breathed into their nostrils the Breath of Life and human beings became living souls.” Ru-ach is the Hebrew word for the Breath of God. The Ru-ach, the Breath of God, is the Holy Spirit. So in the beginning, God gave us life with his Breath. That is different from Air. We don’t become living souls just out of the air we breathe. We become living souls because we are filled with the Breath of God.

Just as God Breathed Life into us, making us Living souls, the Holy Spirit gives Life to the Church, the Body of Christ. And as Christians, Christ- ones, we are, together, the Body of Christ. And each and every one of us is a part of the Body of Christ, as the Apostle Paul wrote in Corinthians Chapter 12.

When we take communion, we eat the Bread, which represents the Body of Christ and each of us as a part of the Body of Christ. When we drink the cup, it represents the Holy Spirit, the lifeblood of the church, the blood of Christ.

Just as we cannot live without food and water, the Church cannot live without our bodies filled with the Holy Spirit, doing the work of God, the Work of Christ!

And we are called to do the Work of Christ Every Day! Every person Born into this world is called to do the Work of God from the very beginning of our existence!

And what is the Work of Christ? The Prophet Micah answers that question very well in chapter 6 verse 8: "He has showed you, O man, what is Good. And what does the LORD require of us, but to do Justice and to do loving Kindness, and to walk humbly with our God."

Think of it! Every Day! Wherever we go! And whatever we do! We are Called to do the Work of Christ! Every person born into this world is called to do the work of Christ, the work of God!

If we are a student or a teacher, we are called to do the work of Christ while we are being a student or a teacher.

If we are an executive, or a clerk, or a day laborer, we are called to do the work of Christ while we are doing the work of an executive, or clerk, or day laborer.

If we are a parent or grandparent, son or daughter, brother or sister, husband or wife, we are called to do the work of Christ while being ourselves and fulfilling our responsibilities.

God intends that doing the Work of Christ be as natural to us as Breathing. And what is the Work of Christ? It is the Work of God: to do justice, and to do loving kindness, and to walk humbly with God, Every Day, Every hour, Every Moment, every second, every instant of our daily life.

Some people have the wrong idea of what it means to be Called to Serve. "Oh, " they say, "That's only for Pastors and Priests,

Deaconesses, nuns, and Missionaries. That's not for me. I'm not called to be anything but a good person, in my own way."

Now we come to the Epiphany, the Insight, the "Ah Hah" Experience I hope to provide this morning.

Everyone Alive is Called to Serve. Everyone Alive is called to do the Work of God, the Work of Christ. And What is the Work of Christ?

To Do Justice! To Do Loving Kindness! To Walk humbly with God!

In 1961, while I was a sophomore in high school, I had encephalitis. I had such a high temperature that I was hospitalized for about a month. After another month of recovering at home, and doing homework every day, I was expected to go back to church before going back to school the next day.

My parents had been Missionaries for the Evangelical United Brethren Church in the Philippines from 1950 to 1954. After returning to the United States, my parents spent one year going around the country

and telling people about their missionary work. In 1955, my father began to serve E. U. B. Churches again. So my first Sunday back to church after my illness in 1961, my father was preaching. The text for his sermon was Isaiah 49: verses 1-6.

My father was preaching about the Mission of the Church as a whole to be the Light of the World and not just be a candle in the corner of a room, a church that only does good deeds close to home.

While he preached, I read the text many times. And I came away from my reading with an insight that I would like to share with you this morning.

Reading Isaiah 49:1-6. (read as it is written):

“Listen to me, O coastlands, and hearken, you peoples from afar.

The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name.

He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me;

He made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away.

And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”

But I said, “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; Yet surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God.”

And now the LORD says, who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength -

He says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Read this way, it's pretty much the standard Call to Serve that a prophet gets from God.

Now let me read it the way my insight led me to understand it.

Isaiah 49, verse 1b: “The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother God named my name.”

The LORD calls to each of us from the womb, from the body of our mother, God calls us. God knows us before we are born. God knows us before we are named by our parents. And God calls us to be Servants of God.

Isaiah 49, verse 3: “And God said to me: “You are my Servant, Israel, in whom I will be Glorified.”

Let’s change one word: “And God said to me: “You are my Servant, Paul, or You are my servant, John, or You are my servant, Bryon, or You are my servant, Barbara,in whom I will be Glorified.”

As I read it again, Everyone, put your own name in there. This passage is for you. God is calling you!

Isaiah 49, verse 3: “And God said to me: “You are my Servant, (), in whom I will be glorified.”

That's it! That's the Insight! God calls Everyone! God doesn't just call preachers and prophets and missionaries. God calls everyone. Because Everyone can serve God in their own daily walk. Everyone!

Isaiah 49, verse 6: "God says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant just to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel;"

To paraphrase, "God says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant just to love those who love you."

"just to love those you meet at church, or choir practice, or school, or places where you feel comfortable."

Instead, God says, in the second part of the verse, "I will give you as a Light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Loving those who hate us.

Loving those who have hurt our feelings

Loving those who make us angry.

Loving those who are unlovable.

God calls us to serve. From the beginning, from the womb, God calls our names!

God knows us! Before we know Anything or Anybody. God knows us, because God breathed into us the breath of life. We are living souls because God breathed into us the Breath of God. We belong to God, long before we are born and lose our way.

It's a new year. Time for New Year Resolutions. Make one. Respond to God's Call to Serve. There is a world in need of our example, as Christ is our example.

And what does the LORD require of us:

TO DO JUSTICE,

TO DO LOVING KINDNESS,

TO WALK HUMBLY WITH OUR GOD.

Wherever we go! Whatever we do! We are to be Servants of God. If we choose to be missionaries, or preachers, or teachers, or bricklayers, or tent makers, or anything else at all, we are Called to Be God's Servants as we do it.

We are to do justice! Seek justice! Advocate for justice! Vote for justice! Lobby for justice! March in the streets for justice!

We are to do Loving kindness, not because we are loved back; Not because someone Gave something to us first, and we owe them; We are to do it because Walking with God means to do loving kindness as we live and breathe!

It means to do justice no matter what the cost! It means being willing to serve God even to the Death, Death on a Cross. And that is exactly what Jesus did for us!

We are Called to serve God, with every move we make, with every breath we take. We are called to Serve God with our whole being. To follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Reading again from Isaiah 49:

“. . . God called you from the womb,

From body of your mother God called your name.

And God said, “You are my servant, in whom I will be glorified.”

“And now, the LORD says, who formed you from the womb to be
God’s servant,

God says, “It is too small a thing for you to just love those who love
you, to just light up your own little corner of the world,

I will give you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach
to the end of the earth.” That God’s Kingdom may come on Earth
as it is in heaven. Just as it says in the Lord’s Prayer. Amen.